



Wisconsin Update

Newsletter of Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin

Vol. 20, No. 3 Supporting the option of aid-in-dying for the terminally ill Sept. 2010

River Hills Physician and His Alzheimer's Stricken Wife Chose to End Their Lives By Their Own Hands

By Crocker Stephenson

(Mr. Stephenson writes for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. His story was posted on JSOnline on July 22, 2010 and by the next day had received 116 comments. It appeared in the July 23, 2010 issue of the newspaper. The article has been shortened here.)

On July 16, 2010, two days before he ended his life with his wife of 53 years, Daniel Gute, a retired physician, wrote a note explaining their mutual decision to die.

The two-page handwritten letter is signed by both Gute and his wife, Katherine, whom he calls "Kitty." Kitty Gute had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease more than a year before.

The note describes Kitty Gute's failing health, daily indignities and chronic pain. It touches on their determination not to allow

the vibrant life they had shared come to an end in a nursing home, where they feared their deaths would be no better than dragged out and wrested from their control.

"I am hoping that sometime this weekend I will have the guts to act to deliver us both from a more dismal situation," he writes.

"I have been thinking about this for a long time. It will not be easy. However, as time goes by it will not get any better."

(Continued on p. 3)



Katherine and Daniel Gute, in 1995.

September Membership Meeting

The meeting will be held in Madison at the First Unitarian Society on Saturday, September 25, 2010 at 9:30 A.M. See the meeting notice on page 5. Come to the meeting and bring a friend.

Allen Birmingham, C&C of WI President, Dies at 78

On May 30, 2010, Allen died at his home in Janesville shortly after being diagnosed with brain cancer.

Allen was a member of the Hemlock Society since its creation and a board member of C&C of WI since 2004. In October 2005, he was elected president of C&C of WI, where he provided steadfast leadership for the chapter until his death. In addition, since 2007 he was active in the C&C End of Life Consultation program and its monthly training sessions. Al-

len's death is a tremendous loss to the chapter. His kind manner and sense of humor will be sorely missed by those who served with him. One board member said, "I will always remember Allen for his kindness, his calm and for his confident presence."

Susan Wester Elected New President

Susan will succeed Allen as president of C&C of WI. Susan joined the board in 2007 and was elected vice president in 2008. We are glad to have her and are sure she will be an admirable successor to Allen.

John Eliason Joins the Board as Vice President-Speakers Bureau

John Eliason of Madison has been elected to the board and to the newly created position of Vice President-Speakers Bureau. John is a retired attorney, who was formerly employed by the Credit Union National Association (CUNA) in Madison. For many years he has served as a hospice volunteer. John has undertaken the task of updating and revising the chapter's brochure that contains our mission statement.

Board Creates a C&C of WI Speakers Bureau

The Bureau will contact service clubs, seniors' organizations, academic groups and any other organization that have meetings and might like to have a speaker on the subject of death with dignity. Further, it will enroll board members, C&C of WI members and other persons knowledgeable about death with dignity, who are sympathetic to our cause, to speak to such groups.

C&C of WI members who wish to assist in getting this project up and running should telephone John Eliason at (608) 827-0873.

Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin Board of Directors

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Susan Wester(608) 442-1527
(smwester@mac.com)

Vice President-Speakers Bureau

John Eliason(608) 827-0873
(jewliason@aol.com)

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(destucki@tds.net)

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(dickgrum2@yahoo.com)

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(wolsen@chorus.net)

Member-At-Large

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(Continued from page 1)

One of their three daughters, Mary Witte, found Daniel and Kitty Gutes' bodies.

The two were inclined toward each other in the front seat of Kitty Gute's car, which was parked in the garage of their River Hills home. They had asphyxiated themselves with helium, an inert gas they pumped into plastic bags that covered their heads.

Kitty Gute was 78. Daniel Gute would have turned 80 on Aug. 4.

A search of their home made clear that the Gutes had been planning their deaths for years. Besides numerous suicide notes, investigators found several pieces of literature associated with the right to die movement, including a DVD of Derek Humphry's "Final Exit," as well as the book "To Die Well" by Sidney Wanzer, a physician whose wife had been close friends with Kitty Gute when they were in college.

The notes indicate that the Gutes struggled not so much with the decision to kill themselves, but rather when. Daniel Gute feared that he would grow too frail to carry out their decision or that Kitty Gute's dementia would progress to a point that it would obliterate her ability to form will or intent.

In an undated note titled "Dying with Dignity" or "To Die Well," Daniel Gute writes: "I hope I am making the right call in dying in the very near future; dying well when I am able to act".

"There has been a great amount of emotional turmoil, which I hope to control at the finish line."

Daniel Gute writes that his reason for dying is different from his wife's: "As I have expressed before - I do not want to carry

on in life without Kitty," he writes.

Mary Witte called her parents' deaths courageous.

"I am very proud of them," she said. "I hope I can be as bold for my own children."

In one of the notes, Daniel Gute wrote, "I am sorry for whomever finds us, but it was time to end our lives. In this random world, it was our free choice."

Final Exit Network Puts Up Billboards

FEN has put up billboards in San Francisco, CA, and Hillside, NJ. The message on them is "My Life My Death My Choice—Final Exit Network.org" They are 15 by 49 feet, black and the NJ one looms over a stretch of Route 22 in Hillside, NJ.

Board Action

At a recent meeting, the Board voted to donate \$1,000 to FEN to support its billboard campaign.

Recent Articles on the End of Life

My Father's Broken Heart: How putting in a pacemaker wrecked my family's life by Katy Butler. "My father said that my mother would have been better off if he had died. 'She'd have weeped the weep of a widow,' he told me in garbled speech. 'And then she would have been all right.'

New York Times Magazine 6/20/10

Letting Go: What should medicine do when it can't save your life? by Atul Gawande. Modern medicine is good at staving off death with aggressive interventions and bad at knowing when to focus, instead, on improving the days that terminal patients have left.

The New Yorker 8/2/10

Report on Rev. Mathew Nelson's Sermons to the Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

On July 18, 2010, Rev. Matthew Nelson, a board member of C&C, spoke from the pulpit at both services of the Fellowship in Appleton. The Fellowship is the second largest UU congregation in the state.

He said that in Colorado, C&C had successfully blocked the takeover of a health care provider by a Catholic health care system. One of the Catholic policies of the system states, "Patients experiencing suffering that cannot be alleviated should be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering."

Nelson said that when he hears things like that, in the name of Christianity, he wants to become a Unitarian.



Rev. Matthew Nelson and Connie Raether of Appleton, who helped with arrangements for Rev. Nelson's appearance

Honor Roll of Supporters Who Gave to the June Fund Raising Appeal

Thirty-five (35) supporters donated to the cause of death with dignity in response to the June appeal, many of whom donated for the first time. The total amount that was donated was \$1290.

Those who donated included:

Bobbi Anderson	Amherst Junction
Anna Mae & Russ Boothroyd	West Bend
Elinor S. Cowhig	Middleton
Bob Fizzell	Beloit
Barbara J. Fraser	Madison
John & Judith Hanson	Madison
Lois Hibbard	Appleton
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Claire F. Weber	Madison
Shirley L. Williams	Ripon
David L. Zierath	Madison
Anne C. Zimmerman	Portage

Thank you one and all.

We are enclosing an envelope for donations requesting the same information we previously requested on a card.

Notice of September Meeting of Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin

Members, friends and the public are invited to a meeting featuring

Dr. Susan Wester

Susan is a semi-retired pathologist and the President of our state chapter. She will speak on the topic **Evolution of the Final Passage** tracing how our manner of death has changed historically, ending with physician aid in dying.

Saturday, September 25, 2010
 Courtyard ABC Room, New Building,
 First Unitarian Society
 900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI

9:30 A.M. Coffee and conversation
 9:45 Announcements
 10:00 Program

Notice of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors. This meeting is for the purpose of electing a Board of Directors for the ensuing year and will take place immediately after the meeting featuring Dr. Wester. All current board members and all members of C&C of WI who would like to serve on the Board or become more active in our chapter are urged to attend.

If you need directions to the meetings or a ride call Betty at (608) 833-2774 or Jim at (608) 233-7867.

Letter to the Editor

I am writing in response to the letter from Jenna Fanduzzi that appeared in your December 2009 issue. In the letter, Ms. Fanduzzi explains she is a Catholic and very much against both the Compassion & Choices organization and its goals of allowing people to have "death with dignity" and the death of their choice if they are terminally ill.

Well, I too am a Catholic and I was the person responsible for approving the order to allow my 97 year old aunt to die. She had been in a coma, in a fetal position, for some time and there was no way she was going to get any better. Unfortunately, what that meant was that the institution, where she had been for almost a decade, just stopped feeding her. Then it took nearly ten days for her to starve to

death. I only wish I could have allowed her a quicker and more comfortable death.

I think the Catholic Church has more than enough internal problems to deal with, and should keep its nose out of other peoples' private affairs. If it wants to make rules for its members to follow, that's one thing, but to continue to try to influence legislation that affects all of us should be good reason to take away its tax exempt status.

I also think that Ms. Fanduzzi's time would be better spent trying to root out priests who molest children or campaign against the hypocrisy of a Church that openly discriminates against women, gays and others.

Tom Hickinbotham
 Mukwonago 6/15/10

Letter to the Editor of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel regarding Dr. and Mrs. Gute

(The letter appeared in JSOnline on July 27, 2010 and in the print edition of the newspaper on July 28, 2010.)

In the story in this morning's paper about Dr. and Mrs. Gute taking their own lives, the Gutes' daughter referred to her parents' deaths as courageous. I too believe they were courageous.

I would ask why we have to be courageous to die with dignity. After all, many of us are not courageous. We may be scared of death. We are certainly scared of talking about death. We may be very scared; if we have

seen our parents die protracted and painful deaths. Why don't we have a right to die a quick and peaceful death, if that is what we want? Why aren't we all fighting for the right to be human beings who can die with dignity?

Join the fight. Join Compassion & Choices at www.compassionandchoices.org. Let others know that we insist that all of us have the right to die with dignity with the assistance of a physician when we are terminally ill if that is our choice.

James L. Greenwald
Madison, 7/23/10

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

See address label for your membership expiration date.

<http://www.endoflifechoiceswis.org>

**Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin, Inc.
P.O. Box 55276, Madison Wisconsin, 53705-9076**

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